

**Good Friday A  
April 22, 2011**

**It was one death. One death out of all the billions of human deaths that have ever happened -- infants, children, young men and women, mothers, fathers, aged grandparents. Everybody dies. So why make such a big deal ... it was just one death. One man. Just a blip in human history. Just a drop in the ocean of human misery, suffering and loss.**

**It was one death. One crucifixion. There was nothing out of the ordinary about it. People had been crucified for more than 500 years. The Roman general Crassus crucified 6,000 rebellious slaves in one day and lined the road to Rome with the crosses. It was a death reserved for slaves, pirates, and insurrectionists. It was a death designed to warn others not to rebel or to revolt. It was a tool of the state, a deterrent. It was cruel, and its horrible cruelty made it an extremely effective deterrent.**

**It was one death. One horrible death. But no more startling in its horror than any number of billions of horrible deaths. No more startling than the 800,000 Tutsis killed in Rwanda, or the 6 million Jews killed in the Holocaust, or the 2,000 American children who die from abuse or neglect each year. People are killed every day, and human beings continue to torture, humiliate, abuse and slaughter each other.**

**It was one death. One man betrayed by one friend, denied by another and abandoned by virtually all of the rest. One man weakened by scourging, exhausted by a grueling procession under the weight of a heavy wooden beam, and then hung, completely exposed, upon that beam. The people around him had seen it all before. It was nothing new. It was just one man. Just one death.**

**But this one death was different. Because somehow, it wasn't just one man up there, dying on that cross. Somehow, God hung there, too. Somehow, in this one man, in this one person, Jesus of Nazareth, God was so present, so alive, so embodied, that everything the man Jesus suffered, God suffered as well. Every betrayal, every blow, every taunt. Each lash, each thorn, each nail.**

**God was splayed out there upon that cross, just like any one of the thousands of people who had ever been crucified before. God gasped and struggled for life, just as billions of humans had gasped and struggled for life before and just as billions more would do again and again. And in the end, God failed to sustain the struggle for life. Inextricably intertwined with the man Jesus, the immortal, infinite God yielded to the darkness of death, just as every single human being has done, will do, must do.**

**It was one death. Like billions of other deaths. But it was the one death that changed everything.**

**The immortal became mortal. The infinite discovered itself to be finite after all. The eternal gave way to the temporal. The light of the world flickered, wavered, and went dark. Jesus died. And the divine One, the great I AM THAT I AM, I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE ... discovered what it meant to Not Be.**

**This was no deity at a distance, unconcerned and uninvolved. This was no heavenly puppet master, sitting in the sky and tugging on strings to make humanity dance. This was no clockmaker God, winding up the universe and sitting back to watch it unfold.**

**This was divinity pinned to the wood of the cross like a butterfly, fluttering, struggling, dying. This was God's ultimate act of solidarity, of unity, of complete and total oneness with humanity. God's own self embraced the death God's creatures must die. God's own self became one with each of us, with all of us, in the destiny that none of us can avoid.**

**And because of this dreadful union, God and human, intertwined in anguish there on that cross, because of this "one-ness" of the man Jesus with the entirety of God, as Julian of Norwich describes it, because of this indivisible melding of creature and creator, Jesus must have seen every evil God ever saw as he hung there for those three hours. From earliest humans to the day when our species dies away, he must have known it all, born it all, carried it all.**

**Every childhood taunt, every instance of adult scorn. He bore it. Every casualty of war, every child dead in infancy. He bore it. Every woman who got kicked down the stairs by her lover, every young man shot down in the street. He bore it. Every gassed Jew, every slaughtered Tutsi. He bore it. Every murdered prostitute, every cancer death. He bore it. Every AIDS baby, every crack baby, every abandoned baby. He bore it. Every slaughter ever done in the name of God. He bore it. Every peaceful death, every hate-filled argument, every broken heart. He bore it. He bore it all.**

**It was a lot for one man to carry, to suffer, to share. It's a wonder he didn't explode there on the cross, each atom filled with all of the pain and anguish, hatred and loss that humanity ever knew. Instead, he became like a great portal, a black hole of love, a gravity well that could draw into itself all the evil and sorrow and sin of the world, draw it, hold it, contain it.**

**Until it was finished. Finished at last.**

**It was just one death. But because of that one death, there is nowhere we can go where God is not. There is nothing we can suffer that God cannot bear. There is no evil that God does not comprehend. There is no cruelty that God does not also experience. There is no death that God does not also die.**

**It is all held there, all of humanity, all of our sorrows and joys, sins and graces. All of our lives, all of our deaths. All the ways we hurt, and all the ways we heal.**

**It is all held there. Held on two frail human arms, extended in an infinite embrace.**